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The “Vision of Salome”: Cosmopolitanism and Erotic Dancing in Central London, 1908–1918

JUDITH R. WALKOWITZ

“A NEW CLASSICAL DANCER has made her appearance in London,” declared the *New Jersey Telegraph* on March 23, 1908.¹ This “artistic sensation of the hour” was Maud Allan, an interpretive dancer from North America. Her dance program largely consisted of Greek-inspired classical numbers, in the mode developed by Isadora Duncan (see Figure 1), but it was her final dance of the evening, the orientalist “Vision of Salome,” that drew crowds to the Palace Theatre of Varieties, in Cambridge Circus, at the juncture of Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue. “So enthusiastic are her audiences that the English claim her as a Canadian,” explained the *New York World*, which then proceeded to set the record straight. “Although she was born in Toronto, she was reared in San Francisco, and considers herself an American.” According to the newspaper, Allan’s North American roots only partially accounted for her appeal: “Her art and seductive grace, however, are cosmopolitan,” for Allan “learned the ‘poetry of motion’ in Berlin” and “has studied old Greek and Assyrian manuscripts and tablets” to absorb all she could of “ancient dance lore.”²

At the Palace Theatre, Maud Allan appeared as a superior embodiment of Anglo-Saxonism, a daughter of Greater Britain, who called “open the gates of the World” to “all London.”³ Her triumph at the Palace Theatre facilitated the

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¹ *New Jersey Telegraph*, March 23, 1908, Maud Allan Clippings, New York Public Library.

² “Maud Allan the Rage in London,” *New York World* [1908], Allan Clippings.

³ On the making of the international star as a self-actualizing, speaking subject, see Eric S. Salmon, ed., *Bernhardt and the Theatre of Her Time* (Westport, Conn., 1977); Heather McPherson, “Sarah Bernhardt: Portrait of the Actress as Spectacle,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 20 (1999): 409–54. On the idea of Greater Britain, see Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English-Speaking Countries* (1869; rpt. edn., London, 1890). On the complex mapping of Anglo-Saxonism, metropole, and empire, see Judith R. Walkowitz, “The Indian Woman, the Flower Girl, and the Jew: Photojournalism in Edwardian London,” *Victorian Studies* 42 (Fall 1999): 3–46; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford, 2000); Paul A. Kramer,

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